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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Tuesday, January 27, 1942

Subject: "WHO SHOULD GARDEN IN '42?" Information from garden experts of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Many letters have been coming to the Department of Agriculture in Washington from people who want to help the country by starting war gardens or defense gardens this spring. Today let's have the answer to these questions offered by garden experts of the Department. The experts agree that many families can be of great service by having much larger gardens and growing many more vegetable crops. But other families can help their country most by giving up the garden idea and not trying to grow vegetables this year.

The Secretary of Agriculture explained the garden situation recently when some 250 garden experts from all over the country gathered in Washington to discuss war gardens. The Secretary said: "As we extend the garden food production program beyond the farms of America, I think we need to proceed carefully, and with full considerations of all the factors involved. I do not think the Nation will benefit at present from a widespread, all-out campaign to put a garden in every city backyard or vacant lot.....

"The national supply of fertilizer is almost sure to be scarce, because many of the chemicals which go into fertilizers are needed to make munitions. The same is true of some of the commonly used insecticides and fungicides."

The Secretary also explained that we have no vegetable seeds to waste this year. He said: "The United States long has imported many of its vegetable seeds from Europe and those supplies are cut off now. Our domestic seed industry has expanded to make up the loss, so we shan't suffer from lack of vegetable seeds.

But we don't have such large surpluses that we can be wasteful of vegetable seed, anymore than we can with fertilizer and spray materials.

"To make efficient use of the things required to plant gardens, we need to plan carefully--and give consideration to many different factors. It is ill-advised to plan a garden on poor soil--such as will be found in many city backyards where subsoil from the cellar hole has become topsoil, or where fills have been made with rocks, brickbats and cinders...."

Garden experts go on to explain that so often city gardens are failures---and worse still, a waste of valuable materials like seeds and fertilizers. To have a successful garden in the city, you must have a good-sized sunny lot, away from interfering buildings or trees, away from smoke and gas; you must have good soil, too, and good drainage. All these things are rare in the ordinary city yard.

As long as the United States has the task of feeding itself and helping to feed much of the world, no one should waste seeds, fertilizer, and tools by trying to garden where there is little chance of success. (That's what so many well-meaning people did in the last war.) Perhaps the worst waste in gardens has come from people who rushed into gardening flushed with enthusiasm but without the means, or the will, or the knowledge to carry each crop through to harvest. Our country cannot afford such waste of labor and materials when it is at war.

But this is not to discourage anyone from having a vegetable garden who can possibly make a success of it. The Secretary of Agriculture and other garden experts agree that every family living on a farm or country place should have a garden. Yes, even every farm family living in regions where the climate is adverse much of the year, and every family living on farms where the soil is difficult. Even if you must irrigate the soil, or drain it, or protect the garden with fences and windbreaks, you should have a vegetable garden in 1942 if you live on a farm.

Every family on a farm can raise with reasonable success at least 15 of the vegetables most valuable for their minerals and vitamins. Every farm family can have a garden that includes tomatoes, beans, cabbage and a number of other leafy green vegetables, carrots, turnips, parsnips, or squash.

And many people in small towns and villages should be planning gardens, too, this year, for they have suitable spots of their own for a garden, or can use small plots nearby that have good soil and are not too steep, too wet, or too shady. Generally, gardens too far away from the house don't flourish because they're inconvenient to reach and are neglected. But if you live in a small town or village and have a suitable place for a garden near your house, by all means plan now to enlist among the victory gardeners of '42.

Now is the time to write your State College or the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., for bulletins and other information on home ve vegetable gardens. Now is the time to write your State College for information on varieties most suitable for your locality, and then to order seeds. Now is the time to sit down and plan your garden, to know how many of each kind of vegetables to plant, and approximately when to put them in; to read up on fertilizers and proper preparation of the soil, so when gardening weather arrives, you'll be ready to put in a scientifically planned victory garden, and raise vegetables that will make you proud and healthy, too.

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